

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

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<b>Secretary Clinton Calls for a Renewed Commitment to Advance Women's Rights .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>U.S. Treasury Opens Internet Exports to Iran, Sudan, Cuba .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>U.S. Human Rights Report Has Far-Reaching Impact .....</b>	<b>2</b>

## Secretary Clinton Calls for a Renewed Commitment to Advance Women's Rights

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

Washington — of State Hillary Rodham Clinton called for a renewal of the global commitment to advance women's rights spurred by the U.N. World Conference on Women 15 years ago in Beijing, saying that women's progress is progress for human rights.

Clinton, speaking at U.N. headquarters, praised efforts to improve the status of women and girls across the globe, saying much progress has been made.

"Fifteen years ago, delegates from 189 countries met in Beijing for the Fourth World Conference on Women," Clinton said. "It was a call to action, a call to the global community to work for the laws, reforms and social changes necessary to ensure that women and girls everywhere finally have the opportunities they deserve to fulfill their own God-given potentials and contribute fully to the progress and prosperity of their societies."

But she warned that the progress achieved so far is not the end, but only the beginning of the work to realize the dreams set down in Beijing. Clinton spoke at the conference in 1995 as the first lady when her husband Bill Clinton was president.

"Women are still the majority of the world's poor, the uneducated, the unhealthy, [and] the unfed," she added.

Improving the status of women, Clinton told delegates March 12 in New York, is a political, economic and social imperative. The paradox facing many women is they are the majority of the world's farmers, but often are forbidden to own the land they farm.

"President Obama and I believe that the subjugation of women is a threat to the national security of the United States," Clinton said. "It is also a threat to the common security of our world because the suffering and denial of the rights of women and the instability of nations go hand in hand."

Clinton reminded delegates, in her address to the Commission on the Status of Women's 54th session, that achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is the third of eight Millennium Development Goals, the anti-poverty targets world leaders have pledged to attain by 2015.

Development strategies must reflect the roles for women in society and the benefits they bring, Clinton said. She cited three major U.S. foreign policy initiatives to

illustrate the American commitment:

- The Global Health Initiative, a \$63 billion commitment to improve health and strengthen health systems worldwide.
- The U.S. global food security program, which is a \$3.5 billion commitment to strengthen the world's food supply so farmers can earn enough to support their families and food can be available more broadly.
- The U.S. response to the challenge of climate change. In Copenhagen in December 2009, Clinton announced that the United States would work with other countries to mobilize \$100 billion a year, by 2020, to address the climate needs of developing countries.

## BAN CALLS FOR END TO GENDER VIOLENCE

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon earlier called on the international community to urgently join forces to end one of the most brutal and entrenched forms of gender discrimination — violence against women.

"We all need to unite to demand accountability for the violations of rights of women and girls," he said. "We must listen to and support the victims and, importantly, address the roots of violence by changing the mindsets that perpetuated it."

Sexual abuse during conflict is just one of many ways women and girls are brutalized and denied their fundamental rights, he said. Whether domestic violence, sex trafficking or so-called honor crimes, violence against women and girls is horrific and it devastates individuals and societies alike.

Since adoption of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, international and regional human rights treaties, as well as United Nations resolutions had obliged nations to eliminate violence against women. The U.N. Security Council had adopted resolution 1325 in 2000 on women, peace and security, while other texts had established that sexual violence in conflict could be prosecuted as war crimes, crimes against humanity or acts of genocide.

## U.S. Treasury Opens Internet Exports to Iran, Sudan, Cuba

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

Washington — The U.S. Treasury Department is permitting technology companies to export online services such as instant messaging, e-mail and Web browsing to Iran, Sudan and Cuba to help people communicate through the Internet and social networks.

The Treasury Department on March 8 announced the changes that allow general licenses to export personal Internet communications services. The changes also permit exporting software to Iran and Sudan, but similar export licensing for Cuba is controlled by the U.S. Commerce Department. Previously, digital technology companies were reluctant to export personal communications services to those countries because of federal export restrictions.

"Consistent with the administration's deep commitment to the universal rights of all the world's citizens, the issuance of these general licenses will make it easier for individuals in Iran, Sudan and Cuba to use the Internet to communicate with each other and with the outside world," Deputy Treasury Secretary Neal Wolin said in the announcement.

"Today's actions will enable Iranian, Sudanese and Cuban citizens to exercise their most basic rights," he added.

The action was first recommended in December 2009 when the State Department submitted to Congress notification of a national interest waiver under federal law that would permit exporting free mass-market software to Iran. The software was necessary for the exchange and sharing of personal communications over the Internet. Treasury announced amendments to sanctions regulations that would permit issuing export licenses for the three countries. The changes do not affect restrictions on North Korea and Syria.

The waiver does not apply to encryption and other software that would permit tracking of an individual's personal Internet activity, according to Treasury officials. Both President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton have said access to Internet communications is a basic goal of U.S. foreign policy.

"As recent events in Iran have shown, personal Internet-based communications like e-mail, instant messaging and social networking are powerful tools," Wolin said. "This software will foster and support the free flow of information — a basic human right — for all Iranians."

But Wolin cautioned that the United States will continue to aggressively enforce existing sanctions and will work with international partners to increase pressure on the Iranian regime to meet international obligations. That is a specific reference to efforts by the United States and other Western nations to convince Iranian leaders to forgo development of nuclear weapons. The United States and others are seeking a new set of sanctions against Iran if its leaders do not end uranium enrichment, considered an essential component in making a nuclear weapon.

## U.S. Human Rights Report Has Far-Reaching Impact

*Tracking human rights freedoms, abuses, offers variety of benefits*

By Jane Morse  
Staff Writer

Washington — The original purpose for the annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices was to provide the U.S. Congress with information on countries to which the United States sends aid. "But it has become much bigger than that," according to Michael H. Posner.

"Today it is the single most comprehensive look at human rights around the world done by anyone," Posner, assistant secretary for the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, told America.gov in a recent interview. The report is "a baseline of information about what's going on in human rights every year."

The Human Rights Report, its commonly used shortened title, covers internationally recognized civil, political and worker rights as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These rights include freedom from torture and other cruel treatment, freedom from prolonged detention without charge, and freedom from other flagrant violations of the rights to life, liberty and security.

This year the report has been expanded. More information will be reported on workers' rights, child soldiers, reproductive rights, practices that endanger indigenous people, and discrimination against homosexuals and victims of HIV/AIDS.

"Activists in many countries rely on the report," Posner said, "both because it gives them information they can't get from their own media, and also because as a product of the United States government it has some extra importance and power. And so we find that a lot of activists not only read the report, they circulate the report, they cite the report, and it gives them a sense of amplifying their own concerns [about human rights] and gives them some more authority in debating these issues within their own societies."

The report encourages governments to improve their human rights practices, according to Posner. He credits the findings of the annual reports for motivating the government of Zimbabwe to close in the mid-1980s at least one prison in which prisoners suffered under horrible conditions. The U.S. Human Rights Report, Posner said, often draws attention to abuses that would otherwise go unnoticed on the world stage.

"And governments under the pressure of that kind of scrutiny decide to make changes," he said.

The Human Rights Report also plays a role in determining refugee status in immigration courts in the United States, Posner said. "It's not definitive, but it has been a central piece in making the claim that somebody is going to fear persecution being returned to their home country," Posner said. "So the report became an essential document in that quasi-judicial setting."

Since September 2009, Posner has been in charge of the State Department operation that collects, assembles and distributes human rights information on more than 190 governments. For many years he was a consumer and critic of the report — first as the executive director and then as the president of Human Rights First, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, international human rights organization based in New York and Washington. In those capacities, he said, he spent many hours examining the methodology, findings and evolution of the report.

Mandated by the U.S. Congress in the mid-1970s, the report has steadily grown to include more comprehensive reviews on the practices of a greater number of governments on a greater range of human rights practices. "Now we have a really radically different product," Posner said. "It's thousands of pages long, and it reflects a much more sophisticated fact-gathering approach both at the embassy level and here in Washington. So it really is quite an extraordinary document in terms of its comprehensiveness and detail."

Although most people might focus on the individual country reports themselves, Posner has been interested in the impact they've had on the people producing them. The Human Rights Report, Posner said, "has probably been the single most important educative tool for the [U.S.] Foreign Service."

"We've developed a culture where our diplomats are mandated by law to go out and meet human rights leaders and journalists and human rights activists and civil society — all sorts of people who are not traditionally at the center of what an embassy would be doing," Posner said. "And that has had an unbelievable impact in terms of the sensitivity of foreign service officers to what [human rights] is all about."

The goal of the U.S. Human Rights Report is to tell the truth, Posner said. "It is for sure going to make things more complicated for our diplomats around the world," Posner said. "We're going to have governments mad at them because we are telling the truth. But that gives the exercise integrity. And it's part of the way we are operating and have operated and will continue to operate. That discomfort is far outweighed in my mind by having accurate assessment of what's going on so that we can make intelligent policy decisions."

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